

# THESE AMERICAN WOMEN

## Form Remarkable Quartette in Florence, Italy.

**F**LORENCE boasts a remarkable quartette of American women — a St. Louis woman who stands among the best voice teachers in the Italian city; a woman physician from San Francisco; a daughter of Brooklyn who, when barely out of her teens, founded and maintained by her own energy and funds an institution which aspires to be called "The American Industrial School for Italian Working Girls;" and a Philadelphia woman conducting an "Arts and Crafts."

The first of these, Mme. Barracchia, as Kate Bensberg, achieved an enviable success in Italian opera, appearing for some years as prima donna in the chief Italian cities and in Montevideo with the celebrated Ferrari Opera Company.

As a young girl, she was sent to Stuttgart, where she studied under Mme. Schroeder, under whose patronage

Mme. Barrucchia, singer.  
Dr. Mary Harriss, physician.  
Signora Conti, philanthropist.  
Mrs. A. M. Cobb, publisher.



MME. BENSBERG-BARRACCHIA



or 12½ cents an hour in Italy the usual price for English lessons is a lira (20 cents) an hour. Another girl had \$50 for a year to include passage money, lessons in music and languages and board. In Paris such cases appear at the worst. There many girls are struggling along on almost nothing.

"The economies, unfortunately, are along the lines of food and fire. Many, also, live alone. In consequence, shivering and chilled, they eat food bought ready-cooked in small quantities, badly served and without the repose secured by sitting down to a properly served meal. And all the time the brain is being worked hard when deprived of its fuel. Besides, living alone preys on a girl's spirits. A woman must have some one to love and since propinquity plays so large a part in love affairs, the nearest man at hand finds a point of attack. And, if not a man, often undesirable friendships are formed.

### She Needs Home Life.

"A girl to be well and normal needs the surroundings of home life, where her emotions can have legitimate play and older people watch over her living, sleeping, and eating. Decidedly I think mothers should not send these girls abroad alone as they do. Psychologically and physically it is unwise. Some come at eighteen, with the whole responsibility of living in a strange land on their shoulders. Nervousness and an anaemic condition are the least of the too often consequent evils."

"Are there many American women physicians abroad?"

"Not many, I think. I, for instance, am the only American woman physician in Florence. The reason for this is easy enough to understand, for foreign doctors in continental countries are practically there on sufferance, unless they take the diplomas of the country. In Germany they are not allowed the doctor's title, but must put American diplomas on their signs. Here in Florence the understanding is that they do not practice among Italians."

A third American woman who is prominent in the life of Florence is Signora Conti, wife of Dr. Guido Conti. Before her marriage she was Miss Florence Lizzie Healy, daughter of the late Stephen Weston Healy, of Brooklyn, a brother of Augustus Healy, president of the Brooklyn Institute of Fine Arts. Stephen Healy entered the Catholic Church in Italy, was made a Cavalier of St. Gregory the Great by Pope Leo XIII, and became a member of the confraternity of the famous Misericordia, a member of the Third Order of St. Francis, and a distinguished worker in the Order of St. Paul. Before his marriage he won fame as a great traveler, ascending Mt. Blanc and Mt. Vesuvius, and penetrating African wilds.

### School for Dressmakers.

When a mere girl—she is not much more now—Miss Healy became impressed by tales of the hardships of Italian dressmakers' apprentices. While obtaining their training they are sent to make purchases in the small shops kept by men of, too often, unenviable reputations. The results have made the Florentine working girl somewhat notorious. Miss Healy concluded that if they could obtain their training in a school and start in life as wage-earners their future was likely to be more promising. She had read of American social work and accordingly laid her own plans.

One day she opened her school in a building on the grounds of her father's home. Later she rented a floor of a house in the Via Pier Capponi and this May moved to better quarters in the Via dei Serapiti, a street well known to all tourists. Signora Conti recently explained her work, saying that her dream was to have it become an endowed work with the name "American Industrial School for Italian Working Girls." Her rooms are always thronged with bright-eyed little Italians, some busy at lessons, some sewing hard in the dressing rooms, others preparing dinner, others cleaning halls and arranging pots and pans, all happy-faced and smiling.

### Compulsory Course of Study.

"Sometimes I have had as many as sixty-four," said Signora Healy-Conti. "We are required by the municipality to furnish children who come with the compulsory course of study, so I teach them myself, assisted by a teacher whom I pay. We have a dressmaker to instruct the girls and I hope to add a millinery department later. The domestic course includes cooking and cleaning."

"We give the whole school a daily dinner," added Signora Healy-Conti, "the pupils prepare it entirely. They set the table and clean the building. One girl keeps accounts; another has charge of our little library. Each pupil, however, must become experienced in all the departments."

The American woman who conducts the "Arts and Crafts," in Florence, is Mrs. Arthur Murray Cobb, who was Miss Little, of the family of publishing fame.

On the death of her husband this winter, she took entire charge of the work, which is carried on in Mrs. Browning's old home, Casa Guidi, and includes the exhibition of the pictures of artists, of antique jewelry, leather work, etc.; in fact, all included in the term "arts and crafts."

prospects every time. The young student must remember that art is an exacting mistress and many sacrifices must be made in her favor."

"And what is your opinion of her coming abroad alone?"

"It is better, of course, for a girl to come with some older and experienced person, if possible, but there is no reason why a sensible and well brought up girl with a just sense of her own dignity should not come over to study alone. As long as she behaves herself no one will notice or molest her. She must observe the ordinary standard of what is proper in any respectable walk of life. It would be well for her, however, to remember that conditions of life in a large foreign city are not the same conditions peculiar to a little country town in the United States, and she cannot bring the freedom of American girlhood into foreign cities and not pay some cost."

### Good Voices Always in Demand.

"And another thing. I cannot protest too strongly against girls offering money to secure engagements. It is not necessary. A good voice always commands a price, even if little in the beginning, and the girl who cannot secure an engagement without paying must persuade herself that there is something wrong in her musical outfit and had better go back home and save herself years of bitter experience."

Dr. Mary Harriss, Florence's American woman physician, does not agree with Madame Barracchia about the American girl living abroad. She has a pretty apartment in the Hotel Berchelli, on the Lung' Arno. She has considerable experience to base her opinion on, since, after practicing in San Francisco, she came abroad studying in Vienna and Berlin. Last year the earthquake in her city left her the possessor of four front stone steps in place of a splendid apartment house, and after a visit home she decided to settle permanently in Florence.

"The worst thing," she began in answer to an inquiry, "is that our girl students come abroad with too little capital. It was quite right years ago when living over here was really cheap. But things have changed here as well as at home. Prices of all kinds have gone up, particularly in Italy. In Germany one can still live cheaply, but hardly at the rate these girls expect."

### Expect to Live for Nothing.

"They hear of the cheapness abroad and come expecting to live on money on which they would starve at home. Now for instance, I have met a girl who arrived with \$300 to last her five years. Some one had told her that teaching could be found for her support. How can that be true when teachers are everywhere willing to give lessons for even so low as a few cents an hour? In Germany there are women giving lessons for half a mark



SIGNORA HEALY-CONTI WITH SOME OF THE POOR GIRLS AMONG WHOM SHE IS WORKING

she made her debut at Kroll's Theater, in Berlin, while still in her teens. After a season she went to London. There she studied oratorio and appeared with the Carl Rosa Opera Company. After two years she came back to America, and for three seasons she sang in operatic concerts.

WITH the object of further study Madame Barracchia then returned to Paris, where she became a favorite pupil of Madame Marchesi. During her studies in the French capital she was often heard as a soloist at the American church in the Rue de Berry. The Paris Figaro, speaking of her voice, called it "the voice of an angel." Sonzogno, the famous Milanese publisher and impresario, saw in her an ideal prima donna for Italy, and offered her an engagement, which she promptly accepted. Under his management she appeared with great success in Ambroise Thomas' "Ham-



let," "Rigoletto," "Traviata," "Lucia," and many other operas. She also created the chief role in Leoncavallo's "Pagliacci."

A happy marriage interrupted her career for a time, and when she reappeared it was in London in the



Queen's Hall concerts under Henry Wood. After two years her work was again interrupted, this time by the death of her husband, and she returned to Italy. She settled in Florence as a teacher of singing. Madame Barracchia has very decided views on the American girl students abroad. Speaking of it recently, she said: "As a rule, the American girl comes abroad for voice study too late. Three to four years of study ought to fit a student for a public career, and she should be ready, speaking, of course, on general principles, when she is about twenty-five or six, at the latest."

"Do you find the American student industrious?" she was asked. Madame Barracchia smiled. "I once heard a well-known musician in Paris say that there were only two kinds of American girls, one the serious American, and that she was the finest woman in the world; the other the frivolous American, and she was the most frivolous; there was no medium species. I don't know that I am exactly of his opinion, but I have observed that the American student sometimes wishes to accomplish too much in a short time and then overworks, for she comes over here and wishes to combine study and the so-called having a good time. It means waste of time and ruin to one's future